

The Experience Magazine - Issue 1

Ynspiré



A nostalgic life,
with a new beginning p.38

Intoxicate your senses with a walk through the vineyards p.6
An exciting encounter with nature on the Gemmi p.20



Leukerbad



PFYN-FINGES
Naturpark Wallis
Parc naturel Valais



We invite you to discover the diverse heart of the Valais region

Welcome to one of the most exciting regions that Switzerland has to offer. A bold statement perhaps! Well, just take a moment to leaf through this magazine and here you will find fantastic tales of wild animals and dazzling landscapes. Follow in the footsteps of the Romans along legendary single trails. Discover the diversity of wine and hikes whose beauty will distract you from your weary feet. All of this and more can be found not only in this magazine, but in this unique region itself.

This magazine is about what at first appears to be a tale of two different places. The Pfyng-Finges Nature Park and the holiday destination of Leukerbad may appear to be two separate entities, but in fact they overlap geographically (The Leukerbad area includes 4 of the 13 municipalities in the perimeter of the nature park). The two areas complement each other perfectly as nature, culture, conservation, and the many experiences here coexist in harmony.

This is the first edition of our new Experience Magazine. It contains an invitation to discover and experience our wonderful region in central Valais. We hope that the magazine exists not only as a tourist guide, but that you will be transported into the experience that you read about. After all, Valais has been a place of inspiration for many over the years. And if this further encourages a physical journey to the region, then mission accomplished!

In case you were wondering about the name of our magazine, it includes the characteristically playful “Y” which is included in the German name of the “Pfyngwald”, and a French accent at the end which is also representative of the Pfyng-Finges Nature Park. We hope that you enjoy discovering something new.

Enjoy the read!

Naturpark Pfyng-Finges

My Leukerbad AG

IMPRESSUM

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Thermi and Finya are hiding somewhere in this booklet which also contains a puzzle for inquisitive kids.

The paw print on the wall



You may not come face to face with brown bears in the Alps these days ever since the populations disappeared over a century ago. But here's a reminder that the bear once made its home here in Valais. You can discover more tales and even a preserved paw at the community centre in Oberems (left).

In Oberems, a bears paw hangs outside the town hall. It is a stark reminder of how relationships between humans and animals have developed over time, but it also invites you to see the lower Turtmann area through different eyes.

Deep furrows run through the dry leather; the five claws stick out menacingly at the top. Did a terrifying monster once own this paw? One thing is clear - bears are large animals with impressive strength - proven further still by the huge size of their paws. But what is unclear is whether they were used as weapons. A poem hangs next to the bear paw in the Municipal Hall in Oberems and describes the last time a bear was captured whilst breaking into a sheep pen, where it met its untimely death. The story is over 200 years old, and may even be true...

A berry collector and a hunting trophy

There is evidence that bears lived in Valais until the 19th century. They resided relatively undisturbed and in harmony with humans and fed themselves with fruit from orchards and vineyards. There is just one documented case in which a human was killed by a bear in Valais - Master Petz was the target of a bear hunt in 1830. Sadly, flesh and fur, as well as some individual body parts were considered as trophies. A tragic combination of factors contributed to the disappearance of bear populations in Valais - high

prize money for killing them, deforestation causing their habitat to dwindle, and increasing conflicts with cattle breeders whose herds were threatened.

Forests and berries

The bears most likely lived within the vast area of the slopes south of the Rhone Valley between Grône and the outer Turtmann valley. Which is precisely where the bear paw hangs today, and our Bear Path tells the story of the final creature in Oberems. As an omnivore, the bears probably found shelter in the surrounding mixed forest where food was plentiful. Maybe in the trees, at times in the berry bushes on the higher alpine planes and sometimes in the fields in the valley. So, the next time you go hiking in this area, why not try to imagine the life of the wild bear roaming freely through this terrain?







You can read more about bears and other predators in the book "Animaux Sauvages et Chasseurs du Valais", A. Scheurer, 2020 (*French*)



The Historical Village of Turtmann

The path to Oberems runs through the village of Turtmann which is well worth a visit. Turtmann is a townscape of national importance where many of the old buildings have been preserved and repurposed. They are connected by a cultural path - altesturtmann.ch



-  **How to get there:** By train or bus to Turtmann, then by cable car to Oberems
-  **For families:** there is a large, shady playground and picnic area in Oberems with toilets
-  **Shopping:** Konsum Oberems, Hischier farm shop
-  **Food:** Hotel Restaurant Emshorn, Bed&Breakfast Berginsel
-  **Activities:** hikes from easy to difficult, the Bear Path
-  **Stopovers:** Turtmann Waterfall, Turtmann Culture Trail (see box)

"A"

full-bodied sigh

There are other ways to experience wine other than just by drinking it. You can learn so much on a tour through the vineyards - especially when a professional is by your side.

There is a hiss on a stone. Anselmo Loretan has dribbled hydrochloric acid onto the lumps of rock that our group has collected among the vines. Two against two, a little friendly competition never hurts. In the end, the women got three right and the men two. And that settles two things. First, we're dealing with limestone soil here, and the vines have adapted to it. Second, that a hike through the vines has a lot of interesting things to offer.

Hiking and wine - a connection through music

Anselmo Loretan has been guiding groups through the vineyards of Valais for over 20 years. "Next spring I'll be doing my 1,000th vineyard tour," he says, adding with a smile: "So I've probably learned a thing or two about wine by now." It was pure coincidence that made him a vineyard tour guide. His first visit to Salgesch, the heart of Valais viticulture, was as a musical conductor. "Of course, almost everyone in the music community was a winemaker," he recalls. Out of interest, he completed a training course as a hiking guide, and then the rest, as they say, is history.

We are now in the middle of the vines and the group is breaking a sweat. "Sarment", the wooden shoots of the vines, are cut into small pieces. After another competitive evaluation - once again the ladies are on top - there follows an explanation of the life cycle of a vine, how to prune it, how fast it grows. And above all, what work is behind the viticulture. A soft "Ah" and "Oh" can be heard again and again. The group follows Anselmo's words and hands, which sometimes point to the vines, sometimes to the surrounding mountains. "For me, my tours are primarily about the experience," he explains as we walk on. "People should touch, try - understand."

An "organic" tradition and diversity

"Mmh delicious!" A participant nibbles on a white grape as she walks by. "Fendant. You can tell by the colour," comments Anselmo before stopping. Now he explains the different types of cultivation - conventional, organic, and biodynamic, and what this has to do with the green strips between the vines.


So on to the next guessing game, with an inconspicuous piece of plastic. I won't reveal what that is, just this much - there was another "aha" moment. And a conciliatory summary of the debate






An expert in his "Terroir" - Anselmo Loretan arrived in the wine village of Salgesch through his love of music. He now offers wine hikes here and in the wider Valais area.



 Guided wine hikes from "Wein&Natur": weinwandern.ch

 "Savurando" puzzle hike: discover the world of wine in Valais unguided. Start at fixed times at Leuk Tourismus (Leuk train station), more information: pfyn-finges.ch/savurando



Wine and much more. The vineyards around Salgesch form a scenically and ecologically diverse landscape. Here you can not only discover wine, but also regional history.

between tradition and sustainability: “A process is underway. You get closer, you learn from each other.” Then, in a small clearing, eyes brighten. As the sun pierces the clouds, Anselmo unpacks a bottle and glasses. “It’s about time for a drink.” During the blind tasting that follows – the men gain one point – it soon becomes apparent that, even before the wine was opened, nobody was bored. And that although we are in the middle of the vineyard, we are not in the vines at all. We learn what this has to do with gentle melioration and the vine dispute in Salgesch. What is more complex here - the surprisingly diverse Johannisberg or the history of viticulture in Varen and Salgesch - remains an open question for the time being. “In addition to the experience, I have a second goal,” says Anselmo. “I would like to show the variety around the vines. Communicate how geology, flora and fauna are networked together.”

In the end, enjoyment awaits

Further stops are completed, animals and smells are interpreted. Eventually the men equalise, a forgiving result at the end of a tour that, looking at the clock, was longer than it seemed. But the group doesn’t show any sign of tiredness. Instead, they chatter animatedly. And so, they climb down through the vines, their heads full of knowledge, towards the winery, where everything that happens amongst the vines comes together with a beneficial result. A well-deserved end to the day, one might say. After so much nourishment for the spirit, the body wants its share too.



The vines and the nature park

Viticulture is as much a part of Valais as the sun and the Rotten. However, the Pfyng-Finges Nature Park has a special connection to the winery. In Salgesch there were the first green vines and at the same time bitter disputes about the pooling of goods, also known as meliorations. After tough and sometimes rough struggles, the Poja-Tschanderüno-Undri Zell melioration came into being south of Salgesch. It represents a compromise between the economic demands of the winegrowers and ecological demands on the part of environmental protection and is also one of the cornerstones of the Pfyng-Finges Nature Park. More about this and the development of modern viticulture in Valais can be found in the book “Reben und Natur im Wallis – zwischen den Linien der Natur”, published by Infolio 2020, available in the nature park’s visitor centre. An exhibition of the same name can also be visited here.

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A good place for the curious

Have you always wanted to play detective in old alleys? Use your smartphone to bring historical personalities to life in original settings? Take part in lively city tours, and that for free? Or explore a town with more than 1500 years of history on your own? Then Leuk-Stadt is the right place for you.

Whether digital, guided or individual - you will find information about guided tours on: leuktourismus.ch



Guided tours



Current programme

A bright green ambassador

The Smaragdeidechse (Western green lizard or *Lacerta bilineata*) can only be found in a few places in Switzerland. Anyone who comes across one of these beautiful creatures cannot help but be dazzled! In Salgesch you can learn a lot about the value of these protected species.

A bright green dress and a blue neck for the males during the mating season - the Smaragdeidechse is hard to miss.



Is it a mythical creature? Your first encounter with a green lizard can certainly trigger some skepticism. Not only is it bigger than all the other lizards in Switzerland, but its intense colouring reminds one of a precious stone. Their scaly bodies shimmer in bright green and yellow, while the males also display a vivid blue during the mating season. In addition, Smaragdeidechse

are becoming increasingly rare. In Switzerland you can only find them in Ticino, in the Lake Geneva region and in Valais. The locals simply call them "Griänig", an understated name for such a majestic jewel.

A home in the vineyard

The Smaragdeidechse is sadly considered to be endangered. The fact that it is not as predominant in Valais as elsewhere is due to the conditions here. They love to inhabit dry stone walls and dense undergrowth on ground that is interspersed with stones or slabs of rock. Exactly the characteristic landscape form that can be found in the vineyards around Salgesch. Anyone who hikes into the vines can encounter the wondrous reptile. Especially in summer should you be out and about in the morning; later you can also see wall lizards who scurry through the vines.

What connects humans and lizards?

The habitat of the green lizard is threatened above all by intensive agriculture. Conversely, the colourful animal benefits from diverse, small-scale plots. And also, from the fact that they are networked. Like us humans, it needs freedom of movement and exchange with conspecifics. And there is something else from which the green lizard and humans benefit equally - diversity. In the vineyards around Salgesch, many lizards grow on small plots of land. In the vineyards surrounding Salgesch, many types of wine, including a number of long established varieties, are grown on small plots. This has a profound effect on the biodiversity of the animal kingdom here. A healthy diverse microcosm and an opportunity for wondrous encounters.

Smaragdeidechse Trail Salgesch

The Smaragdeidechse Trail south of Salgesch offers a good chance of an encounter. It can be reached on foot from the village and leads over 2 kilometres through vineyards rich in life. There are several signposts where you can learn about different species, their habitats, and species protection.

Your thoughts will wander alongside you



**Do you find hikes strenuous?
Make your way to Jeizinen and
from there to Sierre. You will
quickly forget your tired feet.**



Arrival: Bus from Gampel-Steg train station to Gampel Dorf, a few minutes walk to the cable car to Jeizinen; further public transport stops in Erschmatt, Guttet-Feschel, Leuk, Varen and Salgesch



Sights along the way: Erschmatt variety garden (guided tours by prior arrangement), virtual tour of Leuk town, Rilke Foundation in Sierre (see next pages)

Even before you start in Jeizinen, you have already completed a small adventure. As you travel up from Gampel in the small cable car, you might recall the train journey through the Rhone Valley, which narrows or widens depending on the direction of travel. But once you're at the top, you can't help but be consumed by the hike, there's just so much going on! Good news for everyone who has restless children who you might normally struggle to motivate to go hiking with you - the hike has so much variety to offer. But if they don't feel like carrying on, there are several public transport stops along the way as an escape route!

Beginning with mountainous beauty and a landslide to behold

The start is as classic as a hike can be - mountains, valleys, and magnificent views. From the Jeizinen mountain station you see not only the central Rhone Valley, but also the Turtmann Valley across the way. So appealing to the eye - the narrow valley floor is in visual contradiction with the mighty Turtmann Glacier, which seemingly floats in the air above, and over which the mighty Weisshorn dominates regally far behind. Closer still, the Bishorn rises into the air. At 4153 metres, this is the highest point in the Pfyn-Finges Nature Park. A view that can

be difficult to tear yourself away from. But there is more...

The further you go, the clearer you can see the next natural phenomenon that comes into view - the Illgraben. What you observe here in different tones of the earth was once on the beach of the primordial sea. The white quartzites were sandy beaches, the yellowish Dolomites were lagoons and the black limestone the seabed. Plus, this stunning landscape is today the most significant landslide area in Switzerland. The Illbach, which usually babbles inconspicuously out of the valley, can quickly become a wild torrent. And where water thunders into the valley, so can the mountain. Fortunately, an early warning system exists for valley communities today, and you can picture the weather forces and historical shifts in your head as you hike westward.

Tradition and a touch of Hollywood

The next station combines nature with culture - Erschmatt is a Valais village straight out of a picture book. Sun-baked wooden houses and spychers stand side by side. But Erschmatt is not just a village-sized museum.

One of the most important traditions of Valais lives on here - the cultivation and processing of rye. Grain has been grown in



The stations along the route alone offer a reason to come back for an excursion. For example, for a bread baking course in Erschmatt (left) or a tour of discovery through the southern streets of Leuk (below).



Erschmatt for centuries. Rye was once food in the truest sense of the word, in fact you could have called it life insurance, because the grain from which the typical rye bread was made was used for self-sufficiency. Up until the 1990s there were even larger rye fields in Erschmatt. Today the large oven in the village is fired up once a year for the people to bake their bread.

The path continues to meander along the slope, past the villages of Feschel and Guttet and towards Leuk-Stadt. And suddenly the world changes. The large circular antennas of the Brentjong satellite ground station stare silently at the sky and are reminiscent of James Bond films from decades past. In fact, part of the system is used by the federal intelligence service as a listening device, but most of it is civilian. The mental cinema show is stimulated in other ways here in Leuk, just look up the slope. The fact that the forest there resembles a field of stubble relates to an event that could have come from a horror film. A fire set by an arsonist destroyed 300 hectares of forest in one night in 2003. Even if this event is extraordinary in terms of its scale and drama, Central Valais is at risk of forest fires due to its drought. If you want to make a fire outdoors, you should find out about the current situation beforehand. Speaking of which, how about a snack on the medieval village square in Leuk, which exudes a touch of Italianità? Or would you rather continue the adventure? After all there are still a few kilometres to go.

God's balcony and man's garden

Those who have left Leuk behind and crossed the Dala, which rushes down deep in the gorge, will reach Varen. A village surrounded by vineyards and with a unique piece of architecture. On the outskirts of the village, which towers over the Rhone Valley like a terrace, stands a church with a balcony. Useless pomp or Catholic profligacy in modern times? Not quite! As anyone who has stepped onto the Varen church balcony knows that it does indeed serve a spiritual purpose. From here you have an unobstructed view of the wild Rotten and the Pfywald behind it - the heart of the natural parks and, if you wish to see it that way, a marvel of creation. The bed load of the Illgraben forms a natural dam here, along which the river winds its way and then flows down noticeably steeper in the direction of Sierre.

If you follow the course of the great Valais river, you will reach Salgesch. This way you

not only approach the language border, but also finally arrive amidst a contrasting landscape. The rugged, high-alpine scenery at the beginning is a distant memory, giving way to soft hills covered with vines. This landscape was also shaped by elemental forces. The Rhone glacier, which today lies high up in Goms, once formed the valley here. When returning 10,000 years ago, it caused mountain flanks to slide down, on the remains of which wine grows today. The dry-stone walls in the vineyards were also created from the rubble of the past. You're sure to spot a few lizards and insects that inhabit these surroundings. And you might relate to the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who became enthusiastic about the beautiful scenery. A separate museum is dedicated to him in Sierre, which persistent hikers can visit at the end of this impressive tour. What, it's already over? How time flies on the road when your thoughts are so occupied!

Today's tradition built on the rubble of the past. Viticulture has shaped the landscape in the central Rhone Valley. The landscape has been carved out by glaciers over thousands of years.

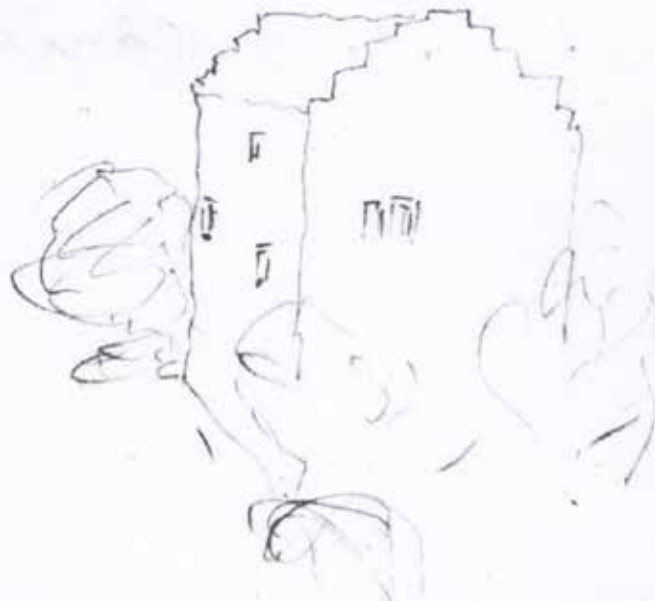


Leuk and the wondrous Werra family

Some family stories are so outrageous that they are hard to believe! One of these is that of a noble family in Leuk. Baron Leo von Werra once owned several estates and a castle in Leuk. In 1915 he had to file for bankruptcy and became almost completely impoverished. He gave two of his children up for adoption in southern Germany to an aristocratic family, who in turn fell into poverty. The brother, Franz, became a flying ace with the Nazis, was a prisoner of war who escaped to England and Canada and before coming back to Germany. His sister, Emma, maintains an intimate correspondence with him and eventually returned to Leuk. The history of von Werra can be recreated via the virtual tour in Leuk or in the book "Du und ich, ewig eins" by Wilfried Meichtry, published by Nagel&Kimche 2021, or by the same author "Hexenplatz und Mörderstein – die Geschichten aus dem magischen Pfywald", also published by Nagel&Kimche 2010.

10

Ich noch zu einem Ausgange, geschickter
 vor dem eigenen Grund zu stehen, — Dank
 Sie! im Haupten der Coiffeur. Nayar,
 Süß Süß am Bellevue, wo man täglich sonnen-
 kommt, in Photographie nicht ferner oder
 d'flores, da treizieme siècle ausdrücken,
 mit — Dank Sie! — mit der Aufschrift:
 "à vendre ou à louer": Chère, et c'est
 peut-être non Château en Suisse, peut-
 être!



Ce n'est que cela, bâtiment historique

Fondation Rilke

The Rilke Foundation is just a few minutes walk from Sierre railway station. On one hand, the foundation is dedicated to the collection of and research related to Rilke's works, but on the other hand, it also has a permanent exhibition and offers guided tours.

More information at fondationrilke.ch



Rainer Maria Rilke around 1924 in front of the Muzot tower (left, below a current photo). Above: In a letter he writes about the discovery of the place near Sierre that was to become his home.



Today it would be difficult to believe that someone like Rainer Maria Rilke would end up in Valais. But what was it that once led the poet here, who already had such a well-known name back then?

A star poet comes to Valais

He had traveled far. When Rainer Maria Rilke settled in the Muzot tower near Sierre in 1921, he could already look back on an eventful life. Born in Prague and raised in Lower Austria, René Karl Wilhelm Johann Josef Maria Rilke, his real name, had become one of the most important German-speaking poets having travelled all over Europe. He had been to Berlin, Leipzig, Munich, Vienna, and Paris, Florence, Rome and Trieste before arriving in Switzerland. What Rilke was looking for here was the peace to continue his artistic work. The First World War had shaken him and plunged him into a creative crisis. Only in the Tower of Muzot did he conquer it.

The power of a special Alpine valley

It was here that he completed his “Duino Elegies” in 1922, a cycle of poems he had begun ten years previously in Italy. The reason for his creative inspiration was the landscape, which he described enthusiastically in letters. “But what has captured me is this wonderful Valais on the other side. I was bold enough to travel down here, to Sierre and Sion; I told you what a strange magic these places had on me” he wrote in 1921 to his friend Marie von Thurn und Taxis. He also visited and admired the Pfynwald. Finally, he even wrote poems in French for the first time in Valais.

Forever in Valais

As much as Rilke’s paperwork flourished again in Valais, his health deteriorated just as quickly. He went to numerous health resorts and clinics in Switzerland. He stayed at Lake Lucerne, near Montreux and in Bad Ragaz. Unknown to him at the time, it was leukemia he was suffering from. Nevertheless, he saw his end approaching and chose his final resting place as early as 1925. And so, he was finally buried two years later in the castle church in Raron, just as he wanted. His self-chosen words are still written on the tombstone:

*“Rose, oh pure contradiction.
Desire to be nobody’s
sleep under so many lids.”*

The bridge to another world



The "Bhutan Bridge" leads over the Illgraben. It's easy to get to and worth a visit. Even for those who have never that enthusiastic about bridges before!

**Book tip: Hiking,
where others are searching**

The area of the Illgraben, over which the Bhutan Bridge leads, is also described in the book "Wandern, wo andere forschen – Ober- und Mittelwallis" (Published by Haupt, 2021). A total of four of the eight hikes described in the book are in the Pfyn-Finges Nature Park. The book is available in the nature park's visitor centre or in bookshops.





A land of mountains, land of valleys, land of bridges. Switzerland may not be the first country that comes to mind. There are many countries all over the world where paths lead across impressive bridges. One of them is the Kingdom of Bhutan at the southern foot of the Himalayas, thousands of kilometres from Switzerland. However, a small piece can be found here in Leuk-Susten in the heart of Valais - the Bhutan Bridge. A footbridge, one of many in Switzerland, and yet this one is particularly unique.

Across invisible borders ...

First, let's look at the location. The Bhutan Bridge spans the Illbach at the upper end of the Illgraben. Anyone who inevitably thinks of "Rösti" when they hear "Graben" would not be too far from the truth - If you exclude Varen and the bilingual Salgesch, the Illgraben can also be considered as the border between two language regions. If you cross it from east to west, you have the French-speaking part of Valais before you. In the opposite direction you can see the German-speaking Upper Valais. There are few places in Switzerland where the language border is as geographically evident as here, where the Rotten becomes the Rhone.

... mighty chasms ...

At the same time, the Illgraben is a place where you can envision the forces of nature that shaped the Alps. The slopes below the Illhorn are one of the most geologically unstable regions in Switzerland. Again and again, the Illbach swells into a raging mountain stream and carries large amounts of rock and debris into the Rhone Valley. Sometimes a landslide occurs, like in 1961, which caused the demolition of the Illhorn, which is so visually striking today, and as a result modern flood protection was created. Even today, the area above the Illgraben is in constant motion. This not only attracts nature lovers - but sometimes hikers also meet at the Illbach on research teams.

... and across cultures

The bridge itself remains. It was created in 2002, the UN Year of Mountains, and in cooperation with the aid organisation Helvetas, who had already built suspension bridges in Bhutan. So why not make this cooperation visible in Switzerland as a bridge? It was built according to plans from Bhutan, which engineers from both countries implemented together. The 133 metre long bridge is a mixture of western and eastern building techniques. Or two "sides" that learn from each other and thus find equilibrium. Perhaps the prayer flags on the railing give an idea of the spiritual as well as physical limits that a bridge can overcome.



 **Arrival:** Leuk train station, from there 2.5 km on foot



Suitable for: Young and old, the Bhutan Bridge is well fortified and accessible from Leuk-Susten train station via a slightly uphill path



Open: all year round

Nature awaits you above

Whoever climbs the Gemmi from Leukerbad enters a different world where many other encounters are waiting too.



The sight of one or more ibexes is also to be expected on the Gemmi...

At the top of the Gemmi Pass, you can't help but look up at the sky. With a bit of luck, you will see golden eagles and bearded vultures there. But there is also a lot to discover on the Lämmerenboden itself, in the east of the pass. Animals and plants - nature has many characters up here. And the Wildstrubel Glacier is one too, even if it isn't in view right away. A glacier path leads from the Gemmi Pass to the Lämmerenhütte at its foot.

Was there a stream here before?

About 200 years ago, the end of the glacier tongue lay where the path begins. Today it is about 2 kilometres further up the valley, but still provides a large part of the water that forms today's floodplain landscape. Sometimes you see it as a trickle, sometimes as a raging brook. If you stay a little longer up here, you can even watch this develop over the course of a day and discover the strange shapes that the glacier has left behind over time, and the diverse plants that grow determindly in the barren and constantly changing landscape.

Fur bearers and feathered giants

Inevitably, however, sooner or later someone else will steal the show from the landscape. Maybe one of the marmots or a member of the ibex colony? Or a mountain hare, which has visibly thicker fur up here when compared to its cousins in the lowlands. And if you look up into the sky, you might spot one of the kings of the air next to the cheeky alpine choughs. Both the majestic golden eagle and the giant bearded vulture are at home up here. If you then want to discover fossils that the primordial sea left behind here millions of years ago, you should set aside more than just one day for the exploration tour in the glacier foreland.

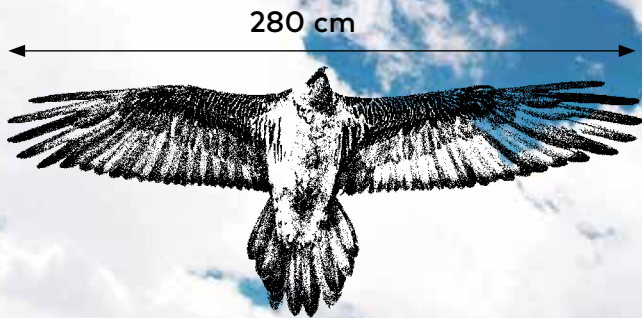
You can find out more about the Lämmeren glacier trail in the brochure of the same name, which is available from the visitor centre in the nature park or from selected tourism partners.

... like sightings of marmots. However, the star of the show resides in the air.



The Bartgeier or bearded vulture


Child eater, lamb thief - many labels have been attributed to the bearded vulture in the past. It feeds mainly on the bones of dead animals. Nevertheless, it was exterminated in the Alps at the beginning of the 20th century. The birds of prey have only been breeding on the Gemmi since 2007, after they were released elsewhere and made their way back naturally on their own. With a maximum wingspan of that can reach up to 2.8 metres, the bearded vulture is the largest bird in the Alps and an impressive sight in the sky. Thanks to its light coloured belly, it is also easily recognisable for laypeople.



The Lämmerenhütte is one of three accommodation options on the Gemmi. Also ideal as a starting point for the surrounding peaks.



 Arrival: By the Gemmibahn or on foot following the Gemmiwand.

 Gemmirunning: If you walk up the Gemmi in less than 60 minutes (65 for women), you get a free Gemmibahn descent and entry to the Leukerbad Therme.

 Staying overnight: Berghotel Schwarenbach, Lämmerenhütte SAC, Gemmi Lodge 2350

Source of happiness.



leukerbad.ch



**Leukerbad
Therme**

A Park of Contrasts

The Pfyng-Finges Nature Park is a park like no other. Both the history of its origins and its landscapes paint a delightfully colourful picture.

Nature and culture - both characterise the Pfyng-Finges Nature Park. What began as contradiction is now harmony. A cooperation in a landscape that could not be more diverse.

Where does a nature park begin, or rather, when? In the Pfyng-Finges Nature Park one could consider the year 1997, when the canton placed the Pfyng Forest under protection. After that, things started to move, tourism concepts were developed, and in 2005 Valais got its first nature park, albeit only at a cantonal level. The Bhutan bridge over the Illgraben was ceremoniously inaugurated, although the actual work was only just beginning. Working groups worked hundreds of hours to convince the park communities and finally submit the candidacy as a regional nature park. A label that the Pfyng-Finges Nature Park has had since 2013.

Beginnings based on discord

But the history of the Pfyng-Finges Nature Park could have begun even earlier. In fact, during the late 1980s, when there was a bitter dispute between nature conservationists and winegrowers who were planning structural and landscape interventions around Salgesch, so-called meliorations. The dispute was loud and was finally heard politically, so that landscape protection in the Pfyngwald was given a value. Seen in this way, the history of the emergence of the Pfyng-Finges Nature Park is one of the contrasts - conflicts that lead to cooperation. But this story also has a history, viticulture in central Valais is part of a cultural mosaic that has developed over centuries.

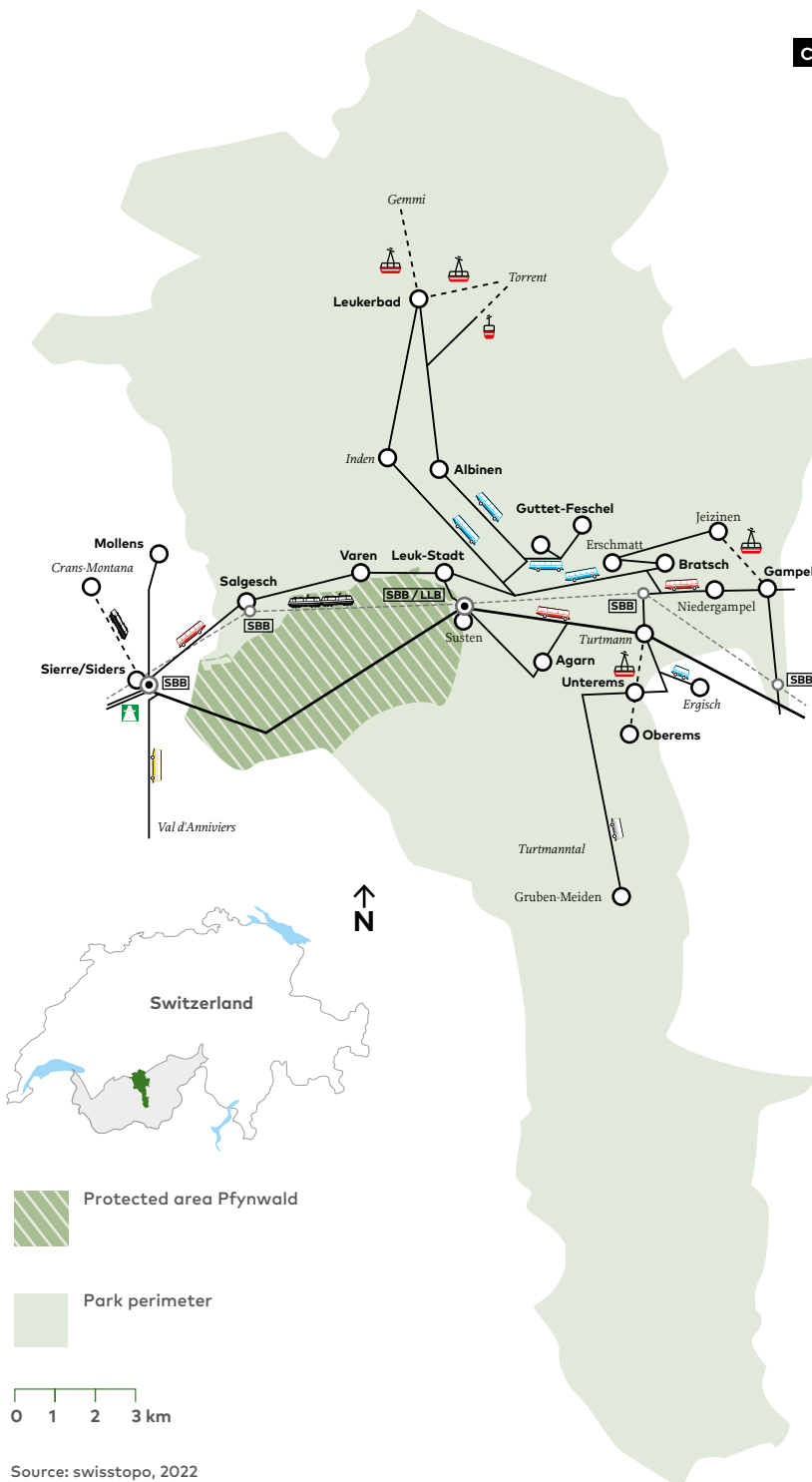
Origins and primeval landscapes

You can also answer the question of where it all started with nature and ends up with the unique geography of the Pfyng-Finges Nature Park. At the Illgraben, which from an altitude of over 2000 metres steadily pushes rock masses towards Rotten and thus not only shapes the upper Pfyngwald, but also the wild course of the great Valais river. Or you look at the other side of the valley, at the Gemmi plateau, from which the Dala also falls towards Rotten over the steep rock face towards Leukerbad, literally running through the contrasts from the ski area to the thermal bathing resort to the Rebberg.

Origin and future

Ultimately, you end up with the people who have shaped the park perimeter and the region which, for a long time, has shaped time. Who worked hard in the vineyards, on the rye fields and alpine pastures to create culture and landscapes that still stand familiar today. Who have combined the historical spa industry with modern tourism and are now looking into the 21st century. Who get together in countless home and cultural associations and sometimes could hardly be more different. But they are pursuing a common goal - to support the Pfyng-Finges Nature Park. And so you find yourself right in the middle of the question about the beginning - in a park of contrasts.

This is the Pfyng-Finges Nature Park



1 Highest point:
Bishorn, 4153m above sea level

2 Lowest point:
Sierre/Rotten, 497m above sea level

Largest contiguous
pine forest in Switzerland

Climate High Alpine to Mediterranean

Language border German–French within the park perimeter “La Raspille”

It counts 139 members.

The association “Lebens- und Erlebnisraum Pfyng-Finges” constitutes the sponsorship for the Pfyng-Finges Nature Park.

13 park communities:

Agarn, Albinen, Crans-Montana, Gampel-Bratsch, Guttet-Feschel, Inden, Leuk, Leukerbad, Oberems, Salgesch, Sierre, Turtmann-Unterems, Varen

Panoramic map

The whole nature park at a glance. Available in the park communities.

Lämmerenhütte
S. 20

Fluhalp
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Albinen
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Torrent-Trail
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Jeizinen
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Erschmatt
Leukerfeld
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Illgraben
p. 18

Oberems
Unterems
p. 4

Inden

Guttet

Feschel

Bratsch

Varen

Leuk-Stadt

Gampel

Susten

Turtmann

Agarn

Because miracles are for everyone

The nature parks in Switzerland offer a wealth of breathtaking and easily accessible landscapes. And if that's not enough, don't worry! There is more.



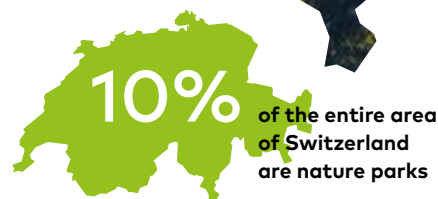
In Switzerland, everything is a little smaller, they say. Yet anyone who visits one of the Swiss parks may see things differently. There are no less than twenty wonders of the world to discover. Even in ancient times there were only seven. And even if there are no oversized buildings to admire in Switzerland, the Swiss parks house enough for big and small wonders. And best of all - for many people in Switzerland, they are literally on their doorstep.

All kinds of landscapes

This is due to the fact that more than half of the Swiss parks are located within or in the immediate vicinity of the densely populated Mittelland. Yet they couldn't be more varying. From gentle vineyards to rugged Jura rocks, from lonely riverbanks to lovely Alpine foothills. Plus a small adventure park right next to the largest Swiss city. If you add the parks in the Alps, you quickly realise that Switzerland has one commonality - diversity.

More than just a backdrop

There are natural landscapes to see and experience – but not just that. In addition to the two nature adventure parks and the uninhabited Swiss National Park, most of the parks belong to the “regional nature park” category. They are all rural regions, characterised by nature and landscape as well as culture. And so, the



Swiss parks are not only backdrops for hikes and bike tours, but they also offer markets, gastronomy, workshops and so much more.

Nature and people together in harmony

And there is something else that makes the regional nature parks unique - the human factor. People don't just visit the Swiss parks, they represent them. Every nature park is created with the involvement of the regional population. They contribute ideas and assist in developing the park further. Thus, every nature park obtains its own distinctive identity. At the same time, the people in a regional nature park are committed to sustainable development and therefore create small model regions for a sustainable life.

Conspicuous parks

Speaking of small, the regional nature parks cover more than a tenth of the area of Switzerland. If you add the two nature discovery parks and the national park, this share becomes even larger. Even the USA, which is famous for its national parks, only comes to just under two percent - five times less than Switzerland. And here the distances are shorter. Even in the most remote parks, one is never on the road for more than a day. A journey worth taking. A small miracle awaits as a reward.



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An aerial, top-down view of a circular hot tub in a swimming pool. Two people are relaxing in the tub, which is filled with white, bubbling water. The surrounding pool water is a clear, vibrant blue. The hot tub's edge is dark and visible against the lighter water.

Hot Stories

Leukerbad is defined by thermal water. And yet, like the town itself, it has a chequered history behind it. This feature is about hot water diplomacy, bathing cows and a journey into the bowels of the earth.

Thermalquellen Steg - The Spring Footbridge

There are two paths that anyone who is interested can learn what makes Leukerbad the most important source of thermal spring in the Alps. The Thermal Springs Trail leads through the village via nine stations and can be walked by young and old. At the stations, walkers learn all about the "Leukerbad gold". Things get wilder on the thermal spring footbridge, which leads on a metal construction into the Dala gorge, where the thermal springs have their source. There, warm thermal water can be drawn directly from the spring basin via a cauldron - literally a hands-on experience of nature. Both trails are open from May to October and are maintained by the Thermal Springs Guild. More information: thermalquellenzunft.ch





When going to the thermal bath, people seek many things. Relaxation, healing or simply time away from the daily grind. But something else can happen in Leukerbad, namely a journey through time. Whoever climbs into the warm spring water here and imagines who has bathed under the proud rocks of the Gemmi can also lose themselves in history. Some stories need more imagination than others, but the setting is always the same - the upper Dala valley, where Leukerbad is located today.

Romans, Burgundians, Bernese

The journey through time goes back to the 2nd century AD. Back then, Valais was called “Vallis Poenina” and after several campaigns that began with Caesar’s Gallic Wars, it became a Roman province. The Romans brought not only war, but also culture, and that included the bathing ritual. The Romans soon discovered the warm springs of Saillon, near the former capital “Forum Claudii Vallensium”, today’s Martinach. Coins found there bear witness to the fact that the Romans also went to the upper Dala valley to bathe. Since Leukerbad was repeatedly devastated by avalanches, there are no structural remains. One can only imagine whether the baths consisted of a figidarium, tepidarium, caldarium and sudatorium - the four main rooms of the Roman thermal baths - like their great

equivalents in the south. The one thing that is clear from the coin finds is that they will have paid a “duty”.

About three centuries later, the Burgundians drove the Romans out of Valais and became the new rulers. Did they bathe too? It was probably the Allemannen who immigrated to Valais via the Gemmi Pass from the 9th century onwards. At that time, the path still led over the Alte Gemmi, a rugged rock incision east of today’s crossing. Anyone who survived this daring path in one piece would certainly be happy to be greeted by a hot bath. Wildly, the Valais story continued. In the Middle Ages, the young blue-blooded gentry quarrelled with the bishops, the League of the Seven Tenths came into being, and strove for independence. The baths in the Dalatal, which have been documented since the 14th century, have also changed hands time and time again. There was not only war, but also lively trade. In the meantime, there was a hospice on the Gemmi and today’s path through the Gemmiwand was built. And where there were travellers one can assume that there were also bathers.

Prominence and spa diplomacy

In the end, however, it was not a wild warlord but a busy clergyman who helped the spa industry in Leukerbad to achieve its big breakthrough. Matthäus Schiner, the Bishop of Sion at the time, gave Leukerbad the status of a parish in 1501 and concurrently acquired the bathing rights. Since the bishop also had the office of prefect, he was responsible for the economic development of the transport routes in Valais, including those via the Gemmi. As a shrewd businessman, he often visited the place himself, which is now known as “Balnea Leucensia”. It is said that he brought many a negotiation here to a successful conclusion. During a long ride, he first led his business partners from Sitten to the vineyards of Leuk. If the convivial drink there was not enough to steer the negotiations in Schiner’s favor, they rode further up the mule track through the Dala valley. A swim in the warm water, accompanied by an informal chat, would have been enough to soften even the toughest negotiator. The simultaneously emerging spa industry brought more and more guests from the north, including the writer Isabelle de Charrière and none other than Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. A century later, it was Guy de Maupassant and Mark Twain who made Leukerbad famous. Finally, in the 20th century, Pablo Picasso, Paul Valéry and James Baldwin were among the international star guests, but Einstein and even Lenin made an appearance. Revolutionaries, scientists, artists - they often came



The view from the Therme to Daubenhorn and Gemmi was probably just like this in former times. Only back then, there was no mountain railroad elegantly traversing the rocks. Right: Even in the olden times, just like now, the water emerged from the ground at a temperature of 51 degrees, thus requiring no heating.

to experience the spectacular pass. The water, which bubbled out of the springs at a pleasantly warm temperature then as now, probably had a wonderful calming effect.

Healing power at 51° thanks to elemental forces

Finally, in the 20th century, bathing tourism received a medical seal of approval. Two spa clinics opened in Leukerbad in the middle of the century - the polio clinic and the rheumatism clinic. Both made use of the healing properties of thermal water. Not only spa guests, but also the locals ascribed healing powers to the water. It is said that the village farmers bathed sick cows and horses in the Rossgillu spring, which today feeds the Leukerbad thermal baths. The animals were also fed water at the public fountains in the village, some of which have naturally warm thermal water. The warm water was also used to wash the milk dishes. Such a fountain still exists today, but the only four-legged friends that frequent it are the dogs of passers-by. But the most important thing is and remains - all the warm water that comes out of the mountain in Leukerbad does so without being heated with any human intervention!

So the last great bathing story is the most adventurous journey of all - that of the water itself. Its path begins east of Leukerbad, between the Majinghorn and the Torrenthorn. Here, at an altitude of over 2300 metres, there are steep cleft systems through which rainwater penetrates deep into the earth. It travels more than 3000 metres and reaches a depth far below sea level. As it flows through various layers of gypsum, it also accumulates calcium and sulphate. Because it is warm inside the earth, the heated water pushes back up until it finally emerges in the thermal springs. This path is not only lengthy in distance, it also takes a long time. Thanks to measurements, we now know that the water has been on its way from the mountain to the source for more than 40 years. So the water we bathe in today dates back to the 1980s, the era of shoulder pads, perms, and the Cold War, when today's baths were just being built. Luckily, one might say! Otherwise not so many people would be able to lose themselves under the impressive mountain backdrop, as once only bishops, world travellers and the ancient Romans could.

The "Badebüchlein Leukerbad", Gabriele M. Knoll (2001), provides more on the history of bathing in Leukerbad, available from My Leukerbad.



Platform 2, Leuk

Those who cannot make it up to the upper Dala Valley can experience an encounter with the power of water at the Leuk train station. On the benches at "Perron 2" you can distinctly hear the roar of the "Schreeundbach", which flows out of the mountain above the opposite bank of the Rhone.



The surprise of elevation gains

Biking on the Torrent Trail is more than just fun. It is also a fast-paced nature experience, where the landscapes just whizz by.

When the sliding doors open, your legs are already tingling. Out of the mountain station, you set your tires on the alpine floor for the first time. The ski lifts are reminiscent of winter, of fun without regrets. But now it's summer, and instead of two slats, two wheels want to be ridden. In your head, everything is already in motion, and yet the Torrent Trail has not even begun. The most beautiful single trail in the Valais, they say. You must be a little excited...

Mountain giants in view, hunting on the trail

First you roll in on the gravel road. Consider what lies ahead - 2021 vertical metres downhill. Plus another 332 metres uphill. Then comes the first post, and the road becomes a path where studded tires hug the terrain. Your heart pumps for the first time, short climbs want to be overcome with pedal power. And after a few minutes the surface opens, you roll towards the Weisshorn. If you take a quick look over your shoulder, you'll spot Mont Blanc in the distance and Sierre further down. You don't want to look back for long, the trail winds enticingly over the mats.

Further ahead, where the trail nestles against the mountain flank, two female bikers scurry away. It seems as if they are chasing each other; they ride fast and close behind each other, changing positions again and again. At one point, Ramona and Rose introduce themselves. They have racing experience, hence the fast riding. But this is their first time on the Torrent Trail. "I like the flow," Rose says. "Where I usually ride, it's not steep going up or down." Ramona continues, "Leukerbad, to me, is beautiful

Riding fun and experience. All sorts of encounters are possible on the many flowy kilometres that invite you to take a pause. If only riding wasn't so much fun!





mountains in close vicinity - and it's so quiet." "Really unspoiled, isn't it?" says Rose. And then with a grin, "I still want to go a bit faster!"

Sustenance for the legs, nourishment for the head

We continue along the forest line, again and again short climbs remind us that altitude metres do not only face downwards, but also upwards. In between, the trail seems like a catwalk, but no one is there to watch, and that's just fine, that's how the ride goes. The first alpine inn invites you to take a break, but the bike wants to continue downhill. Over peaty gullies, a few stones, past the Bachalp, then over a flat carpet of grass along the rippling "Feschilju". The path begins to climb again, and the head has time to absorb the many impressions.

At the Niwenalp, a sign reminds you that bikers and hikers should treat each other with respect. And what about the ravens that seem to mock overhead while a short climb takes a biker's breath away? But the climb is short. Now pine trees line the trail that winds down to the lower Feselalpe. There at a hairpin bend, the Illgraben appears in front of the handlebars. The end is somewhere down there, but it's still a long way off - fortunately.

A laugh in the silent forest

And suddenly the character of the trail also seems to make a U-turn. What was alpine seriousness before, now becomes a game in the forest. Narrow serpentines wind through the trees and invite carefree riding. There is a clatter from above, it calls - no: whoops. It's Ramona and Rose, laughing as they zoom by. You continue alone through the forest, the trail winds around the trees. And if you're not still laughing to yourself, you only hear the freewheel whirring, the rest is wrapped up in the silent bed of branches, roots and needles. A short stretch on asphalt, and the



Rose (left) and Ramona (right) try out the torrent trail for the first time. Even experienced riders like them don't want to miss out on over 2000 metres of altitude.





In the lower section, the torrent trail changes its character again. After playful forest passages and moderate sections with panoramic views, comes the view into the Rhone Valley before it dives steeply down to Leuk and thus to the end point.




view snaps you out of your reverie. You let your gaze wander over the Rhone Valley and the Illgraben, then it's back into the forest, and the urge to play returns. Should you take the leap over the embankment, open the brakes even further? Reason says no, and lo and behold! A deer jumps across the path. You are not alone in the forest after all. Then comes Feschel, for the first time real walls mark the way. You might want to push through the narrow alleys, the place seems so cozy and private. But you continue past the village fountain onto the trail.

Flow versus fascination

In the forest, the joy of flow comes back. But only until you must stop for the family that intercepts your path, complete with child carrier. Together you admire the squirrel that hops upward into the treetop. Then further, a jay flies ahead out of the forest. Suddenly young birch trees appear below and once again the trail changes its nature. But no time to think, you dive into the birches, curve around one or the other. Faster!, calls one inner voice. Slower!, the other. Arriving in Brentjong, the corners of your mouth curve upwards in a smile mimicking the mute circular giant dishes of the satellite ground station.

You could take another break here, enjoy the view, but the bike and your legs know only one direction. Suddenly you pass the first vines, wondering if this is already the end. In fact, Leuk is coming soon, and you roll through the historic walls of the old town. And while you manoeuvre along the last bends towards the train station, while your brake discs and arms are burning, you ask yourself - where has the time gone and where have all the metres of altitude gone?



 **Getting there:** via Leuk by Postauto to Leukerbad (reserve bike spaces on the bus at resabike.ch), then take the Torrentbahn to the start at Rinderhütte (fit people can pedal up)



Requirements: moderately difficult physically and technically, but alpine terrain; Don't forget a repair kit and a first aid kit



Food: several alpine farms and picnic areas along the way



Bike region Pfyng-Finges: The Torrent Trail is just one of 17 bike routes in the Pfyng-Finges Nature Park, which also includes the regional "Valais Alpine Bike" route. These and other trails can be found on the bike map, which is available at the information points in the park perimeter.

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Leukerbad

**Torrent
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Shoulder to shoulder

Albinen is unique even for a Valais village. Just stroll through the narrow streets and you will find yourself in another world.



Whether viewed from a distance or up close, the houses standing side-by-side in Albinen are incredibly distinctive. What stories might be hidden within the beams and walls?

Can they hear each other, the houses that stand so close together? Did the people here once tell stories about the streets? One thing is clear - Albinen is a village with prolific history. Mentioned for the first time almost 800 years ago, it must have been a difficult place to access for many years. Nevertheless, a few hundred people settled here, living off what the mountains and steep slopes have to offer. They guided the water away from them, just as people have done all over Valais. And then a special village emerges. One that has long been classified as a "site of national importance" and has also been part of the exclusive group of the most beautiful Swiss villages since 2019.





Village pictures and wood dating back centuries

Technical jargon describes sites like Albinen as cluster villages, admittedly an unflattering sounding word. The compact, closed design has its origins in times when people were more vulnerable to the mountains and accompanying nature, and used as much land as possible for agriculture. Some of the wood used in the houses, spy-chers and barns in Albinen is several hundred years old. All houses are aligned with the valley, which makes the village look even more harmonious. Each entrance, each window is unique and hides a wealth of small treasures. Often there is a story behind them, you just need time to discover them.

Spared from misfortune

Time has passed in Albinen, and yet it has spared the village from bad fate. No fire has destroyed the village, no landslide and no avalanche has challenged the tightly packed settlement. Only the church was destroyed by an earthquake in the middle of the last century and replaced by a contemporary building. Although there is a new building in the middle of the village, it seems welcome there, seeking a warm alliance. This village is more than just an arrangement of houses - anyone who has ever been to Albinen will confirm this from the bottom of their hearts.



-  **Getting there:** By Bus from Leuk or Leukerbad (irregular connection; note the timetable)
-  **Sights:** Wasserhüüs near to the church, building a model barn in the barn of culture and an AA+ (only on pre-registration)
-  **Activities:** Various hikes and tours such as the "Eggweg". For those with a head for heights a path leads over the "Albinen Ladders" from Leukerbad to Albinen
-  **Food:** Wirtshaus Godswärgjistubu (only with reservation), village restaurant Sunnublick, restaurant Flaschen at the gondola Talstation

A look into the past and a path towards the future



A visit to an Alpine farm is always a journey into the past. But these places also have a future. This is a portrait of the Fluhalp above Leukerbad.

Searching for a change and finding a new life - Petra Rosky appreciates the tranquility and honest work on the Fluhalp.

*“It’s honest work.
You create something with
your own hands”*



Sometimes a summer whim can transform a whole life. Petra Rosky’s story really does sound like a fairy tale. But the path that made the German woman into an Alpine girl was also tough. “At the time, I wanted to get away from the city, to fulfil a dream,” she recalls. For years she worked in advertising and led a hectic life in Düsseldorf. Then came a sign, the possibility of a change. “I searched the exchange for seasonal jobs on Alpen. I really thought I was just taking a break here.” And that’s how she came to the Fluhalp twelve years ago.

Up there, at 2000 metres, in the furthest corner of the Dala Valley, lived Marcel Mounir Senn. He took over the cheesemaking on the Alp from his great-uncle, who made cheese on the Fluhalp 90 years ago. Petra and Marcel partnered up, and she ended up coming back to the Fluhalp for another season, then another. “In the beginning I travelled back and forth between my life in Düsseldorf and life in the Alps. Here in the summer, there in the winter,” she recalls. Life up there is sparse and characterised by hard work. Everything is different, including the language of the people. “And yet at some point I finally chose to live in the Alps.”

Honesty and sustainability

It’s the peace, but also the work that Petra Rosky appreciates on the Fluhalp. “It’s honest work. You create something with your own hands,” she says. In addition to her and Marcel Mounir, there is one more seasonal worker on the Alp. The three of them take care of 70 cows every summer up here, 10 of which belong to Petra and Marcel. “I know most of them by name,” she says and laughs. Every year they produce several tons of cheese that matures up on the Alp.

And then there are the guests. Many just come for a short break and a snack, others stay overnight. “Often they are looking for exactly what I found up here - peace, deceleration, the simple life. Some even leave their mobile phones in the valley!” She, who knows the longings of city dwellers all too well, was the one who expanded the

What the valley has in terms of (apparent) comfort, the Alp trumps in terms of the level of leisure and tradition that can be experienced.



Sennhütte into guest accommodation. “Of course, it fits in very well with the general sustainability trend. But there are also people who cannot imagine how life without electricity and running water is possible. They have their ‘aha’ moment up here.”






Petra and Marcel sometimes must manage the expectations of the guests a bit too. “On principle, we only serve what we produce up here. So cheese, sausage, bread and cake. No French fries with chicken nuggets!”

Machines, climate and a belief in the future

And yet not everything is the same. Vehicles and machines have also found their way onto the Alp. A road means that the cows are no longer driven up and down on foot. “It means that the work moves a little faster here too,” explains Petra Rosky. “As a result, fewer people are needed, and the work isn’t quite as hard as it was a hundred years ago.” And there is another major difference - the tree line is moving upwards due to global warming. “We have to cut back larches and other small trees from year to year.”

Despite all the changes, Marcel Mounir and Petra Rosky can imagine life in the Alps for now, and nowhere else. “We believe in the future of our Alp,” she says. This is one of the reasons why she and her partner have now taken over the lease themselves. But first comes the winter. Petra Rosky will spend it with her partner in Leukerbad, where she has been working in the cheese shop for several years. She now knows more than most about the cheese she sells. Above all, how much effort is required to create it. And how beautiful the surroundings.



-  **Restaurant Fluhalp: Open from mid-June to mid-September, then on weekends when the weather is good**
-  **Getting there: on foot from Leukerbad (2h) or from the Rinderhütte (3h), further hikes possible in the direction of the Lötschental (Gitzifurggu/Ferdenpass)**
-  **Taxi Alpenglück: Between Leukerbad and Folljeret, from there a 1 hour walk**
-  **Overnight stay: by prior arrangement, max. 3 people**
-  **Information/cheese orders/registration: fluhalpe@bluewin.ch; fluhalpe.ch**



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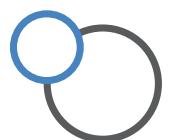
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The European bee-eater (above) is a colourful messenger from the Mediterranean region. It has made its home around the ponds of the Leukerfeld (right).




In a hidden paradise

Have you heard of The Leukerfeld? If you are seriously interested in ornithology, it may ring a bell. If not, then now is the time to discover it.



 On foot or by bike (wallisrollt.ch): from Leuk train station, follow the Rotten on the other bank upstream and then over the bridge (approx. 3 km) or over Agarn; From Turtmann train station, follow the agricultural roads 2.5 km down the valley to the ponds.

 By public transport: from Leuk train station, take the bus to the "Agarn Dorf" stop (then approx. 2 km on foot)

 By car: no on-site parking available, nearest parking space in Agarn

 Guided tours for school classes and private groups at pfyn-finges.ch

Admittedly, the description of the location could sound more appealing - between the motorway and the golf course. The Leukerfeld lies between Agarn and Susten, in the middle of the north and south slopes of the Rhone Valley and above all, with its bushes, ponds and rough meadows, it is ideally situated for a wide variety of bird species. It is with good reason that ornithologists come here from all over the country. For the uninitiated, this is what people who watch birds call themselves. And if you find that appealing, you should roam through the Leukerfeld with binoculars and an expert guide.

An elegant southern immigrant

The "main attraction", if one can say that in such a species-rich area, is the Bienenfresser. This colourful bird is native to the Mediterranean region and used to only come to the Rhone Valley for a short period of time. Today, due to global warming, the warmth-loving insect hunter can be found in Switzerland throughout the summer and can be observed between Mai and August. The Leukerfeld is one of the few places in Switzerland and the only one in the Rhone Valley that the magnificent bird has chosen. Speaking of insect hunters, the bird - which in French makes do with the wasp - is not responsible for the population of bees. Rather, its population itself is vulnerable, even though it is currently increasing.

Where there are a lot of birds, there must be some rules

Not only the Bienenfresser can be spotted in Leukerfeld. Rare waterfowl like the kingfisher also favour the area. Anyone who now wants to throw themselves enthusiastically into ornithology should observe a few simple rules - birds don't like to be disturbed either. Keeping your distance and not irritating the animals with calls should therefore be a matter of course. Likewise, respecting paths and barriers. There are several observation posts set up in Leukerfeld for this purpose. Otherwise, the same applies as always when observing nature - allow yourself to be impressed!

Play hide and seek with Thermi and Finya

Thermi, the drop of water, and the elf Finya never stay in one place for long. Follow their wild journey through the nature park. A puzzle story for children.

an.» Such a long way up the mountain! I'm only wearing swimming trunks." Thermi trembled and gave Finya an angry look. She grinned back and said, "But you're not bored anymore, are you?" This made Thermi angry. "You mean winged thing! Let's see who's better at hiding here. I'll wait where many paths cross", called Thermi and jumped into the nearby stream.

"How bored I am!" cried the little drop of water and rolled over the stone on the river bank. "For us water beings, every day is like the next." Then the tree rustled above the drop and a leaf fell on it. A leaf? No! Suddenly there was a little green elf sitting next to Thermi. "I think you lack imagination, little rascal," she said. "Come on, I'll show you where time goes really slowly, and you still don't get bored." Meet me at the end of the valley!" And just like that, Finya was gone. Her friend Thermi had to look for her. But as always when they played together, he was happy to join in.

Finya looked around. "There you are," she said, spotting Thermi on a wall. "That was almost too easy, my little friend." Thermi had to laugh. "You can talk! I was watching from above for a long time. You searched and searched and searched..." "Yes, yes!" Finya interjected. "Well now I'll think of something difficult for you. Can you count, little drop? If the number is right, the journey continues." Thermi hadn't noticed how Finya had disappeared. He only heard her voice from a distance: "One tip: you recognise yourself there."

2

A long hiking trail passes by here, which shares its name with a town, a railroad line and is the road to a well-known spa. What letter does it begin with?

3

This place has to do with travel and probably with water. Thermi doesn't have far to go from his last hiding place. There is a number that indicates which letter in the alphabet is being searched for.

1

In a valley there is an Alp at the top, where life is almost the same as it used to be. What is the last letter of the hostess' first name?



Finya had to fly a long time to find Thermi on the shore. "I'd rather not stay here long. I'm not scared, but water can be so wild." Now Thermi had to laugh. "I will remember that. You're cheeky, but not wild." Finya had already recovered and said quickly. "Whatever! But you always play in water, I find that boring. I want to go to in a cable car. I don't think you would dare go up in it. You're afraid of big animals."

5

In the place where you found the last letter, there is a cable car station. Anyone who rides up with it will find the tracks of a large predator.

After Thermi sat helplessly on the wall for a while, his eyes lit up. "That was clever Finya! But I'll find you in the end." And after a few moments he found Finya sitting on a bench. "You're smarter than I thought," she said. "And braver too!" Thermi replied. "Let's meet in a wild place where a drop can turn into a tidal wave." Thermi spread his arms and let the wind blow him away.

4

This place is sometimes a stream and sometimes a raging river. What is the first letter?



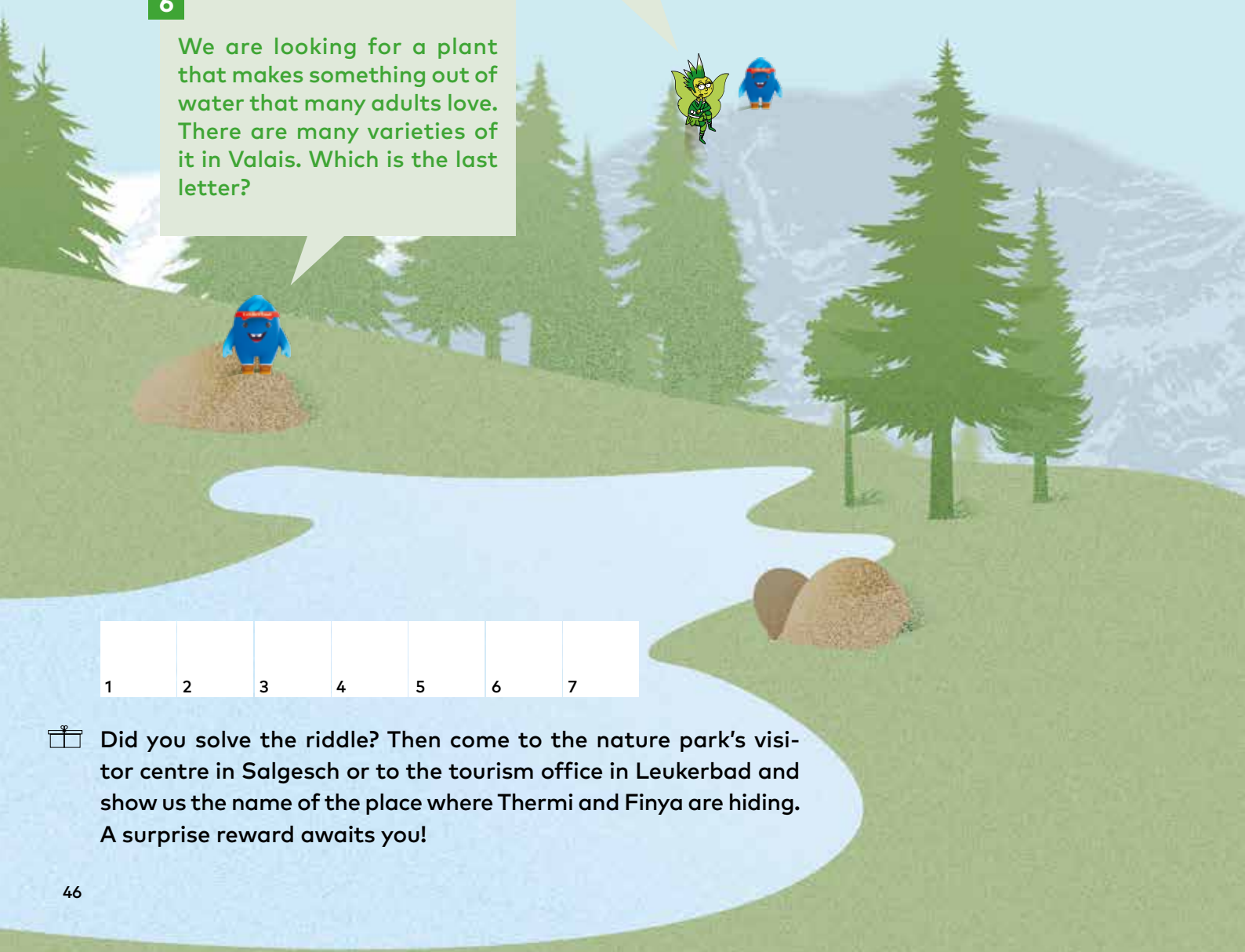
Where are Thermi and Finya traveling to during their hide and seek game? Leaf through the magazine and you will find them both. If you discover a small Finya and a small Thermi, the solution to the puzzle will not be far.

Thermi got nervous. He really didn't like big animals. But maybe he didn't have to take the cable car at all, just to the valley station. He knew exactly which Finya meant. He pulled himself together - and sure enough, she was already waiting in front of the entrance. "So you did dare after all," she said. "No, I trusted you. I knew you would not harm me", said Thermi. "Nevertheless, never do that again. You must be gentle with a drop of water. That's how to win my loyalty. I'll wait in the place where they have known this for a long time." Thermi sank into the ground and was gone.


"And I thought us elves were sensitive!" Finya said to herself as she flew down the valley. She quickly solved Thermi's puzzle. "Come out, little drop. I didn't mean it to hurt your feelings." Then Thermi popped out of the ground. "Neither did I. Shall we stop hiding? I'm getting tired. Let's tell stories." "Agreed," Finya said. "But I have one last riddle. It's easy, I'll meet you there."

7
Do you know which place you're looking for? It is also the solution to the puzzle when you find out the last letter. Thermi and Finya are hiding in a house there, telling each other stories.

6
We are looking for a plant that makes something out of water that many adults love. There are many varieties of it in Valais. Which is the last letter?

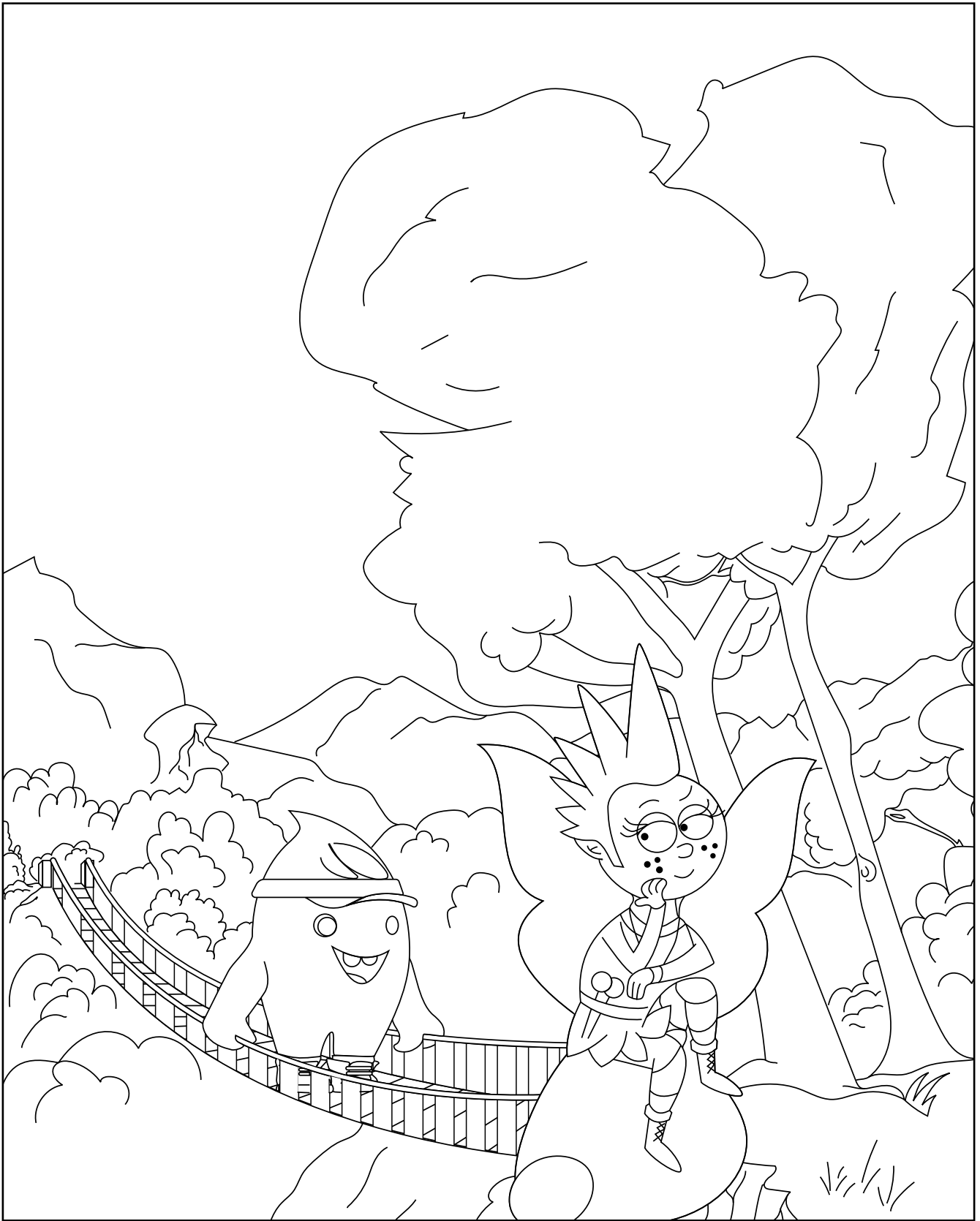


1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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 Did you solve the riddle? Then come to the nature park's visitor centre in Salgesch or to the tourism office in Leukerbad and show us the name of the place where Thermi and Finya are hiding. A surprise reward awaits you!

For colouring in

Thermi and Finya are on the road again in the nature park. But they could do with some colour.



Where are Thermi and Finya here? Leaf through the booklet and find out.

Let's do
it in the train.

regionalps.ch

